

THEBES COURT HOUSE  
THEBES · ILLINOIS

Alexander Co.

HABS NO. 25-17

HABS  
ILL.

2-THEB

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*Reduced Copies of Mechanical Drawings*

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
CENTRAL ILLINOIS DISTRICT NO. 25

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
EDGAR E. LUNDEEN, DISTRICT OFFICER  
BLOOMINGTON ILLINOIS

Thebes Court House, Thebes, Illinois

ALEXANDER Co

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by Edgar E. Lundeen, Bloomington, Illinois - May 1934

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"In the earliest days of which we have any record, Thebes was known as 'Spar Hawk's Nest' or as 'Spar Hawk's Landing'. Just when it was given the classic name of Thebes is unknown. It was platted in 1844. Writers who say it is ever surrounded by the Mississippi even in time of high water are in error, for only a small portion of it is in the bottom. The remainder of it is snugly located on the hillside or on the hills, to reach which we have to climb a stairway of 98 regular steps and then go up an incline of about 30 degrees from a horizontal for a good one hundred yards."

Thebes was the third seat of the Court, 1845 - 1860. It was preceeded by America 1819 to 1843, and Unity 1843 to 1845, and followed by Cairo, 1860 to the present day.

The Old Court House at Thebes was completed in 1848. Mr. F. Earnst Barkhausen, born in Prussia, and a German trained architect was the architect and contractor for this building. He settled in Thebes in 1845.

"It is a two-story stone building, so built as to have the first story set back into the brow of the hill, ~~and~~ to have the floor of the second story about level with the ground at the back. Across the front there was a long porch with stone columns and from this porch you could get a wonderful view of

the Father of Waters far below. Very much like the roads approaching some of the fortified towns of the Old World did the old road wend its circuitous route from the landing up by this venerable temple of Justice to the top of the hill and on to the Indian Country farther East." This road is now abandoned.

Altho we have been unable to verify <sup>the tradition</sup> ~~it~~, many of the citizens claim that Abraham Lincoln spoke in this building. It is certain that General Logan plead a law suit there and also spoke here for the Union in the trying days of 1861.

"After the County seat was moved to Cairo the Old Court House was used as a church for a while and later was left vacant for a number of years, only to be the abode of bats and owls. Finally it was bought by the I.O.O.F who are the present owners. In repairing it several changes were made which have detracted much from its original charm. The old road has also been changed so that this building can be approached only from the rear."

An early photograph, owned by a local post-man shows evidence of a double stairway up to the second floor under the two storied porch. The second floor was apparently a single room originally, with no evidence of any interior stairway.

Local lore tells of a prisoner condemned to death and confined in one of the two dismal cells on the ground floor. He dug his way to freedom through the three foot thick wall on the south side and was never recaptured. Evidences of a patch-

ed hole in the masonry seem to bear out the tale. The other cell, a little less dismal, and less heavily guarded, was for women.

Traces of two fireplaces on the ground floor still exist, but strangely enough there is no evidence of a fireplace on the main floor.

References: Publications of Illinois State  
Historical Society Vol. #34.  
pp 71-72

History of Alexander, Union and  
Pulaski Counties  
by Wm. H. Perrin pp 464-465

Lester E. Lundeen

Bloomington, Illinois

Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.

Patent. U.S.A. to Franklin G. Hughes and  
Joseph Chandler 10/15/35.

W.D. Josiah Chandler et ux to  
Franklin G. Hughes 12/30/35.

W.D. Franklin G. Hughes et ux to Geo. W.  
Sparhawk and Geo. P. Frazier 8/19/36.

S.W.D. G.P.Frazier et ux to G.W.Sparhawk Jr. 9/17/44.

W.D. G.W.Sparhawk Jr. et al to County of  
Alexander. 2/26/45.  
Plat March 2, 1846, shows said block was  
donated to said County of Alexander for  
County Seat.

Q.C.D. Alexander County to Trustees of M.E.  
Church; Building only. 3/ 3/68.

Q.C.D. Alexander County to Mrs. Lou C. Gibbs. 7/16/79.

S.W.D. Lou C. Gibbs and husband to Trustees of  
United Baptist Church of Jesus Christ,  
called Sexton Creek Church. All of  
said block except south part. 8/26/79.

Q.C.D. Lou C. Gibbs and husband to Thomas A.  
Brown, south part of said block. 4/20/80.

Q.C.D. Thomas A. Brown et ux to Mrs. Lou C.  
Gibbs. 5/ 8/85.

Cert. of Master in Chancery to C.C.  
Miller, sale. 5/ 6/1920.

S.W.D. C.C.Miller to Trustees of Bridge City  
Lodge #963 of I. O. O. F. 6/21/1920.

Submitted by John M. Dewey,  
Recorder for  
Alexander County,  
Calico, Illinois.